Help Somebody Today!
There’s a chill in the air – that is, some mornings. Yes, it’s time again for the North Georgia Conference Warm-Up Sunday. This third annual event sponsored by the Committee on Persons Living in Poverty is scheduled for October 12.

Local churches are urged to collect “gently used” or new coats, hats, and gloves to help keep our brothers and sisters warm this winter. The hope is that each church will form a relationship with a nearby helping agency to distribute these gifts to those who live in poverty and experience desperate situations.

A note from Orange Church in the Atlanta Roswell District captured the spirit of the occasion. Sharon Kessler wrote, “I wanted to let you know that last year and this year our church collected Warm-Up Sunday clothing to distribute to M.U.S.T. Ministries. As always, it was great to see everyone giving so generously to help others. What a blessing! This year our church packed 9 extra-large boxes with coats, hats, gloves, and sweaters for all age groups! The youth of our church wrote notes and cut out poems to put in the jacket pockets, and then helped sort and pack all the items into boxes. In the years to come, I know it will be a memory that will “warm” their hearts. It’s a wonderful ministry and we are thankful to be a part of it.”

Thousands of items were collected last year and distributed throughout our Conference. You are invited to participate by selecting someone who will spearhead the effort and get word to the congregation through announcements, bulletin inserts, newsletters, web sites, and other means of communication. Why not think of a way for church people to “offer” their gifts at a special time in worship? Prayers might be offered and items dedicated to God and to helping persons living in poverty. Once these things are collected, make sure volunteers size, label, box, and deliver them to the chosen agency.

Warm-Up Sunday works!! It is an uncomplicated way to assist people who are in need. It might even save a life!

Ed Tomlinson

Conference Hospitalization and Health Insurance
The rates and benefits changes for insurance for 2004 are now available. They are posted on the Conference web page (www.ngumc.org) under “Pensions/Insurance”. Thankfully, the increase is approximately half of the anticipated as indicated by previous market projections. Also, the mandatory clergy salary deduction scale is listed on the site.

Retirees Houseparty
The annual houseparty for the retired clergy and spouses will begin with lunch on October 7 at Simpsonwood Conference and Retreat Center. The originally planned "Lighting of the Logs" has been postponed for chimney maintenance.

Approximately 150 will participate in part or all of the event which concludes with breakfast on October 9. Bishop Bevel Jones will speak in the first session. Wild at Heart (a group of United Methodist clergy) will present a concert. Dale Jones of the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits will inform the group of the new pension program which is being offered to General Conference and how it might effect current retirees. Keith Pritchard of the Georgia Methodist Federal Credit Union is scheduled for a discussion on scams and identity theft. Emory Clergy Care will be represented by Fred Smoot and Woody Spackman. A fun evening featuring a Ray Stephens impersonation is also on docket.

If they act quickly, there is still time for retirees and spouses to enroll. Contact Leigh Ann Sanders at lsanders@ngumc.org or 678-533-1372.

Spotlight on Nora Martinez
As I begin to write this spotlight on Nora Martinez, Associate
Director of North Georgia Conference’s Office of Church Development, I have to admit I’m grinning at the blatant paradox I just experienced. Though Nora may be short in stature (she towers at a mere 5’1’’), the amount of energy and compassion compressed into that small-frame is totally mind boggling.

In the midst of our hour-long interview, I was not only impressed with her dedication to Hispanic ministry, but also the fervor in which she meets her job everyday. Where does this enthusiasm come from? Maybe it erupted from being told she couldn't be in ministry due to her gender. Perhaps it was fashioned from the dullness she felt oozing from her Catholic upbringing. Perhaps it's both. But honestly, I think it's simply because this petite woman has a big heart for Hispanic people searching for a Christ-centered community where inclusiveness and the gracefulness of God abound. The neat thing is--she is helping them find it.

**NORA:** I was raised Catholic and was enrolled in a Catholic girls school. But, I first heard the message of the Gospel when I was 16 when I visited a protestant Evangelical Church lead by American missionaries. Then I started a relationship with Christ.

**TIM:** You didn’t experience that in the Catholic Church?

**NORA:** It was way too boring. The protestant church had people my age, and the service was contemporary. They did welcomed me, and I felt included. It was nice.

**TIM:** But I understand that you decided to leave this welcoming church. Why?

**NORA:** It was many years later. I was living in Venezuela, and at that time, Venezuela was very progressive regarding women's issues, and my family was, too. I was taught that I could be anything I wanted to be. I never dreamt that my church, or denomination, would tell me differently. But they did. Women weren't allowed to be preachers or hold leadership positions. And they weren't very open to assisting the poor, which was something I was very interested in. After a while, my husband an I decided to leave the denomination.

**TIM:** What brought you into the United Methodist Church?

**NORA:** The Social Principles, actually. I picked up a copy of them after a service at The Good Shepard UMC in Chicago. I knew then and there that this was the Church where I needed to be. The Good Shepard was, interestingly enough, an Anglo church who had opened its doors to the Hispanic community.

**TIM:** Interesting how supporting Hispanic ministry and integrating Hispanics into Anglo churches is now what your job description is with the Office of Church Development. How do you think that the North Georgia Conference is doing concerning Hispanic Ministries?

**NORA:** We have done good work in the past, and are really progressing and improving. My vision is that the Conference take seriously the fact that the Hispanic population has grown 300%. We need to start new ministries that are successful. I'm not interested in starting new Hispanic ministries in the basement of churches. I want to start ministries that effectively reach the Hispanic community and welcomes and integrates them into existing communities of faith. That means that those existing local church members must be interested and willing to learn from another culture and overcome the natural fears that arise when we try to protect our territory.

**TIM:** Is that happening effectively now ... as effectively as your United Methodist Church in Chicago?

**NORA:** Oh yes. In some places this is working well. We have a couple of churches where the Anglo pastor and members have taken steps to welcome new Hispanic members, and the Hispanics aren't looked upon as outsiders. They have made the transition well into welcoming new people. They do their services together.

**TIM:** No matter how inclusive you may be, that still might be an uncomfortable process for some, huh?

**NORA:** Sure it is. That's only natural. That's were I come in. What I tell churches who are thinking about this is to first create a firm foundation. That starts with a
demographic survey to see if, and who, the people are in their neighborhood. If the Hispanic members are from Mexico, Puerto Rico--stuff like that makes a difference. Churches then need to find out what social needs there are in the community. Then I suggest making connections with the school systems and members in the community. This is where you find valuable information. With that foundation, then the ministry team can decide what their vision is and come up with a mission statement. Without a foundation, research, a mission and vision, a collaborative ministry is doomed to fail.

**TIM:** Let's talk about a bi-lingual service that not only didn't fail, but was quite a success. Tell me a bit about the Conference-wide service that was held last week.

**NORA:** It was a success. We had about 350 people in attendance with the majority being non-Hispanics. I was happy to see that. The purpose of the service was to celebrate what God is doing, and to reinforce the idea that we all are a part of the Body of Christ--Anglo and Hispanic. Contamos was there, and the speaker had a very good message about finding hope in despair. It was a celebration.

**TIM:** Is this sort of a vision that you hope to see in the future of the North Georgia Conference--seeing Hispanics and non-Hispanics worshiping God together?

**NORA:** Sure. Partly, we wanted this to model what can happen, and what we would like to see happening in the conference down the road--Hispanics and non-Hispanics celebrating God together. I think that once people see it happening, and happening successfully, then it doesn't seem so intimidating.

**TIM:** What's next for you and your emphasis in Hispanic ministry?

**NORA:** The next big project is gathering Hispanic leaders, both lay and clergy, together this November for a training session. We will teach Bible study, evangelism, grant writing, and sexual ethics. If we want to reach a new generation and new people, we have to empower our leaders with knowledge today.

**TIM:** Do you think it's a good time to be in ministry with Hispanic people?

**NORA:** Oh my, this is a great time to be in ministry with Hispanic people. I am honored that I can be a part of it all. It can be frustrating at times, because I get a little impatient, but we are making such a difference. I am proud of that.

For more information about Nora, or to contact her to come to your local church to discuss Hispanic ministry in North Georgia, contact Nora in the Office of Church Development @ 678.533.1388 or nmartinez@ngumc.org.